

THE
COURT JEW LIPPOLD:

TALE OF A SIXTEENTH CENTURY MARTYRDOM.

NARRATED BY
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Dedicated to

My Mother :

To her who breathed grand hope
 Into my pen ;
Who sent ambition's glow
Thrill through my soul ;
 These lines
In fresh-plucked wreaths detached
From martyr's brow,
With homage true engraved,
To her I love,
 I dedicate.

THE COURT-JEW LIPPOLD

An authentic vindication from the state archives

WITH what inimitable pathos chimes the fanciful metaphor of *Arda Viraf*, (A. C. E. 1321) the Parsic ‘Roman-cero’ of wit, wisdom, allegory and sentiment, when symbolizing the virtue of good deeds, it dreams:

In Paradise I beheld one departed from earth, over whom a spirit sang, ‘Well is he by whom that which is his benefit becomes the benefit of another.’ Then in the dawn the soul of that departed one passed amid pleasant trees, whose fragrance was wafted from God.

And there met him a beautiful maiden, whose form and face were charming to heart and soul. To her he said, ‘Who art thou, than whom none so fair was ever seen by me in the land of the living?’

The maiden replied, ‘O youth I am thy actions.’

The vision, which fixed the “starward gaze” of the righteous, in cloudless skies of immortality, where only angels of transcendent wings soar in myriad swarms athwart the studded arch of blue, is *history*. The present alas! is ever o’ercast with pensive shadows of uncertain hue. It is in the past where toiling, drudging, transient humanity basks in the sunlight of calm consciousness, where the reflection of ages, which have shuffled off the mortal coil of time, is as luminous to-day, as if suffused with the mellow flame of an all-divining light, which seeks to discover with the irrepressible search-light of noble truth, the cause and issue of life’s unswerving current, as it glides into the Bay of eternity.

Israel is a nation which lives in the whirl of antiquity. And is it surprising that a race, chosen by an only God, whose signet ring sealed the sanction to its survival, and whose standard, emblazoned with the loyalty and allegiance of a lofty type swells out with the breeze of hope and swings

high with the hope of life, should commune with the gaunt phantoms of a teeming past, and revel in the luxury of meditating, singing and worshiping at the shrine, which marks the imperishable monument of its illustrious prophets and martyred heroes?

History is an arbitrary tyrant, but fair. It does not omit facts when within sight of mankind's lynx-eyed gaze, nor pervert data for sake of harmony. Yet many a Nature's nobleman of sterling valor and undeniable merit must lurk in the tombs of oblivion for the cold neglect of posterity, and when tired of waiting for the Messiah, desperately bursts the fetters which chained him to the cells of obscurity and emerge in triumph crowned with a halo of self-rendered homage, proclaiming with justifiable pride the thrilling story of a mission bravely championed by this Phoenix-knight newly risen from the embers of a dying century.

The tale of such a zealot's remarkable career, defrauded from the annals of history, is herewith narrated.

Joachim the Second, elector of Brandenburg (1535-1571) permitted the Jews, who in the year 1570 were expelled from his territory, to return to the assigned limits and reside there under his protection, with the proviso, of course, that a considerable amount of tribute be paid by them in return for the privilege. Although they underwent the bitterest hardships and cruelest persecutions in their former domicile, the alluring prospect of even temporary peace and promising profit beguiled their hesitation into determination, and the majority repitched their tents under the ominous shadows of intolerant Berlin.

The active animation and sagacity of the Jewish race, especially proverbial in commerce and monetary affairs, soon became apparent in this thrifty community, for despite the fact that extraordinary sums were annually paid into the royal treasury, and to aristocratic parasites, they very quickly regained their prestige, and governed the entire market and exchange in Brandenburg.

Joachim the Second needed money, much money. More patriotic than clever, he had largely assisted the emperor, at the beginning of his reign in his Turkish wars, and thereby contracted heavy debts, which added to enormous outlays involved in the erection of gorgeous edifices he ambitiously adorned his land with tended to increase his embarrassment in no inferior degree. The palace in Berlin, the fort in Spandau, picturesque air-castles here and there, undoubtedly bear evidence of his artistic tastes and devotion to the country, but manifest no prudence and judgment in financial administration; then the gallant diversions of Joachim also made serious inroads upon the resources at his command.

Thus it happened that the elector shortly found himself face to face with a moderately large deficit, quite helpless how to extricate himself from the dilemma. Ministers of Finance, upon whom he could have fathered the burden with an easy conscience and then dismissed with curt disgrace, were not then yet in vogue; he was therefore compelled to avail himself of one sole expedient.

"If the Jews," he shrewdly philosophized, "adjust their own difficulties so satisfactorily and operate with so much success when their welfare is concerned, why should they not be equally as ingenious and fortunate when the weal of the state is at issue? At any rate the matter is worth a trial."

No sooner said, than done!

He had become acquainted with *Lippold*, eldest son of the Jew Hluchim (from Prague) who migrated to Berlin, an exceptionally intelligent, and for his age, an uncommonly well-educated man, who at one time proposed plans by which the governmental coffers would be profitably replenished. In his perplexity, he applied to this worthy financier, and after various negotiations, Lippold, the Jew, was duly installed in the state service as chamberlain and mint-master. Aspiring for a nobler calling than that allotted to him amid his own humble surroundings, he left his modest dwelling

(in Stralauer Strasse) anno 1558, in order to take up his abode in the electoral mint.

The oftener he delivered the Regent from urgent distresses in money matters, the more important and influential a personage did the Jew Lippold become in Berlin, and it can only redound to his credit and honor that he endeavored with rare unselfishness to lighten the burdensome yoke under which his unfortunate coreligionists groaned. It was owing mainly to his fervent intercession, that in 1554 the yearly tax levied upon Hebrews was considerably diminished, a significant sign that this slight deficiency was easily replaced by the industry and management of the Jewish revenue agent; the other enterprises of Joachim, ventured in order to increase his income, as for example alchemy, in which he profusely indulged, only wrought pecuniary difficulties, even if they contributed much that was unknown, to Science. In fact, we glean from the statements of Lippold that the expenditures for the alchemists and their laboratories (in the gray cloister) far exceeded the receipts, since we encounter only items of outlay, but none regarding the profits which may have attended such experiments.

At the court and in town, they not only observed with chagrin and envy the gradual popularity and esteem with which a member of the Jewish race was favored, but a slowly developing hatred of the whole nation was brewing, and the sullen mob grumbled in undertone against the alleged superiority of this despicable rabble.* This spite was amplified by Lippold's unlimited assumption of loftiness and culpable pretensions. He was unwise enough, in fact, to parade this weakness before persons of high rank, to whom he behaved in a manner not at all conformable with his station. Of course, the distinguished gentlemen refrained from venting their ire when the Jew allowed them to wait like menials for many hours in the audience-chamber, awaiting the elector's convenience. They tenderly nursed

*"Hamansgesindel" is the expressive original.

their grudge, content for the time being with plots of future revenge, for under existing circumstances they were perfectly powerless against the favorite's all-accessible might,—particularly since most of them, independently of these considerations, found it to their advantage to preserve his good graces.

Lippold was engaged in private speculation also, besides his official capacity: he had established a magnificent lombard house, which rapidly flourished to an incredible magnitude and attained wide repute. Among the pledge certificates—the greater proportion of which are still extant—may be found the names of estimable nobles and citizens of the higher grain: even a Burgomaster of Berlin figures as a patron.

To this another item: Lippold aroused the evil regard of the aristocratic party, which was then in very affluent circumstances, by another provocation. The elector, in order perhaps to procure metal for coinage, and most probably upon Lippold's instance, issued the proclamation that all citizens of Berlin in possession of old coins were to deliver them up for royal use upon the payment of their full value. But, since very few, especially among the wealthy residents, heeded the decree, Lippold suddenly appeared one day in the homes of eighteen eminent citizens, accompanied by electoral halberdiers, laid before the terrified occupants the prince's commission, and demanded the surrender of all minted money. That such a violent infraction upon the rights and properties of honorable townsmen, even in those narrow times of regal absolutism, created much unpleasant excitement and ill-feeling, is as little to be wondered at, as the singular fact that the elector was not charged with the blame of the assault, and the Jew Lippold, as a natural consequence, served as the butt of their abuse. He was the scape-goat whose sacrifice alone would be ample expiation. Fear again curbed their passionate anger, and they forbore to mention the episode; but it was not forgotten; they hoarded it up together with other grievances for the final reckoning day. Only a spark was needed to cause the eruption of the heated volcano, and

launch the lava of oppression once more upon the head of the chamberlain and his loved confrères.

One would think that at least Lippold's co-religionists, who were indebted to him for many inestimable services in their behalf, would prove grateful by avowing their allegiance to him, which would have rescued him from the venomous onslaught of subsequent events. We regret to state the contrary. Lippold was too precautions, and really much too devoted to the interests of his lord, to allow himself the exercise of lenity toward his Hebrew brethren, when the annual assessments were collected, an office which he greatly against his inclinations was obliged to assume. Rigor and extortion were foreign to his nature; where he met with actual want he dealt with admirable indulgence; in fact, as a later examination proved, unable to collect (according to his own admission) a deficit of a few hundred *gulden*, with which an impoverished brother was taxed, he covered the amount from his own pocket, thereby giving another testimony of his loyalty to the prince's cause. The animosity on the part of the Jews, therefore, we must declare to be absolutely unwarranted and unjust on the strength of these benefits; it resulted from the circumstance that Lippold's love to his nation was but secondary to his faithful affection for the prince.

The year 1571 broke the magic spell of a long continued peace. The sword of Damocles was hanging over the loyal exchequer.

On the second of January, the elector was on a wolf hunt. In the evening he supped with his counselors, and had, upon retiring, jokingly inquired of Lippold, who bade him sign some receipts for various disbursements, whether he himself was not the best quittance? Then he accepted a cup of malmsey as a sleeping-potion from the hand of his trusty financier, and composed himself to sleep. At midnight he was suddenly aroused from slumber by a burning fever and agonizing pains and before his attendant physician, Dr.

Luther, a son of the celebrated Dr. Martin Luther, could come to his assistance, the prince was a corpse.

The confidential counselors of the regent, fled from the bedside in utter consternation and took hasty refuge at home. All feared that an end had come to their position and fortune, and now the trying hour of reckoning and responsibility has struck. No one, however, was as thoroughly dejected as Lippold; for he knew only too well that in a single night he had lost everything. He was aware of the vindictive attitude his foes would now assume, the personal malice and tyranny of the new ruler Johann Georg. Already on the following morning the trustiest advisers of Joachim the Second, and the Court Jew Lippold were arrested; although the former upon satisfactory vindication of implied charges, and through the energetic intervention of influential relatives was soon acquitted. Against Lippold, however, for whom no one pleaded, an investigation committee of three stern men headed by the privy counsellor *von Arnim* was organized.

Hardly was the intelligence of the elector's death and the imprisonment of Lippold, the Jew, conveyed to the populace, than the long pent up fury against the Jews found expression in unheard of outrages and unrestrained madness. The synagogue in Cloister Street was plundered, the dwellings of opulent Jews were ransacked and all members of this miserable congregation were most ignominiously handled. No one essayed to remonstrate against this abandoned brutality; their only protector, to whom they were so often ungrateful was confined in the den of dishonor.

Lippold could not reckon upon the leniency and indulgence of his judges; he could not rely upon the righteousness of his cause, hence he was irretrievably lost. The judges whom Johann Georg had placed in charge of the case proceeded quite unconcernedly in the matter, but they were deemed, together with the President of the Court, *von Arnim*, men of sterling principle, according to the conceptions of that epoch.

With extraordinary minuteness of detail they sifted the accounts of Lippold, which despite their exemplary neatness and exactitude, could be deciphered but with difficulty, as they were compiled in Hebrew, and had to be interpreted by a Jewish expert sworn in for the occasion. But whatever the investigation council found therein—and the historian may yet find, for they are preserved to posterity uninjured—only reflected the integrity and fidelity of Lippold, and related in full particulars how the able financier chronicled the expenses of the prince with conscientious zeal, often even venturing to add sentiments of vehement disapprobation concerning the amours of his master, which was a source of continuous extravagance. Nowhere was a trace of fraud or embezzlement to be noticed. On the contrary, the coinage-bills showed the amount of 1700 *gulden* due to the Jew from the state-treasury; moreover Pantel Thumb and the electoral *valet de chambre* Matthias declared to have seen the mint-master Lippold, hand various sums to the prince in their presence, without obtaining receipt for the same. Only an item of 8000 *gulden* he could not substantiate with notes, upon which he remarked that the regent had presumably, drawn up the quittances, but in spite of repeated applications neglected to hand them over to him. Lippold's excuse was soon corroborated, for upon a thorough search among the documentary remains of the elector, the missing statements were discovered endorsed with his signature.

The court, therefore, had no other course in view but to liberate him from accusations of dishonesty and embezzlement. It is true, he was released from prison only to be re-besieged in his house on Stralauer Strasse, by the suspicious citizens.

The pawned articles were, as far as it could be ascertained, refunded to their original owners, without the slightest regard to Lippold's well grounded claims. After that he was granted a limited respite of quiet.

One day however, while quarrelling with his wife, the

latter, in a moment of exasperation called him a knave, and reproached him for "his practice of the black art and all sorts of magic rogueries for the exercise of which he had long since merited the penalty of death." Hardly had the watchful burghers, who found it rather irksome and monotonous to keep a steady surveillance over the Jew's doings, been apprised of the new epithet applied to Lippold, than they brooked no delay in informing the new regent, who in turn had him conveyed post-haste to prison in chains, and resigned him to the justice of even more rigorous magnates. An arraignment for sorcery was a cause sufficiently justifiable according to the high-minded legal statutes of Karl the fifth, to subject the accused to the torture, by means of which an avowal could be extorted. Lippold's guilt became all the more culpable, because upon his person was found a Hebrew book, containing numerous prescriptions for all manner of tricks and juggleries. In the terrible toils of the rack, the infirm victim soon confessed to a complete mastery of the magical art, and in his agony even added that owing to this attainment, he had succeeded in captivating and hoodwinking the deceased regent.

When they questioned him again he denied nothing, and despite the fact that his remarkable integrity had been established in the bills of exchange previously examined by the court, he was made to say that he had often deceived the prince, the latest instance being the extraction by false representations of a heavy golden chain from the elector's possession, on Christmas past. This last point is significant. Lippold received the chain from his master for alchemistic purposes, desiring furthermore to manufacture medals which he intended for presents to his courtiers. Joachim had, in fact, donated such favors to his counselors on New Year's day, and although the presiding judges were perfectly well aware of this, as is evident from the record of proceedings still to be consulted, the mere contradiction of it by the forced statements of the accused, sufficed to convict him in this particular also.

And now the fiendish idea of holding Lippold responsible for the unexpected demise of the prince, possessed the examiners, and they forthwith applied the torture to telling effect.

In the throes of that awful agony he was made to admit that he was guilty of the elector's death, and in fact declared to have poisoned him with nutmeg-oil, cadmia and *Mercurius sublimatus*.

Even if we were not acquainted with the above rendered verdict of Dr. Paul Luther at the inquest, every rational individual without being a jurist, would first ask whether the prince's death was in any way lucrative to Lippold's rather precarious existence. The answer is necessarily negative, for we know that Lippold's fondest hopes were centered in the life and prosperity of the regent, who alone would shield him from his enemies and, above all, the venom of the successor.

When the Jew was to have avowed his crimes publicly, he retracted everything snatched from him under pressure, whereupon, however, Balzer, the executioner, tortured him so keenly, that he fainted, but revived after taking some restoratives; for this signal feat Balzer was greatly lauded by a "highly enlightened tribunal," and accredited with much skill and acumen for achieving what he had done.

The wretched Lippold naturally re-admitted everything under such horrible pangs. Accordingly he was legally sentenced to be broken on the wheel, and as the chronicle of the town clerk in Cologne narrates, he was on January 28th, 1573 "mit glühenden Zangen gezwackt, darnach von unten-auff geredert, volgens geviertelt, vor jedem Thore ein Viertel aufgehenkt, dass Haupt uff S. Georgens Thor gestackt, das Eingeweide sampt seinem Zauberbuche gen Himmel mit Feuer geschicket."

A large mouse was seen running by the scaffold, and the ignorant multitude there assembled all firmly believed it to be the Devil, who lived in Lippold, and refused to be burned up with him. The worldly effects of Lippold were confis-

cated or rather appropriated towards defraying the expenses of the trial (?) and only the sum of 1000 Thalers was reserved for the widow's use, in consideration for the inestimable service she had rendered to justice. She hastened before the throne of Emperor Max II. with the earuest petition that he intercede with the new elector in her behalf.

Max II. was much less tyrannical than his time; he complied with her request, wrote to the reigning prince, enjoined him not to deal unjustly with the unfortunate martyr's widow, to which the regent replied with curt civility, "er wünschte nicht weiter in dieser Sache behelligt zu werden; die Magdalena Lippold habe dem Hingerichteten selbst seine Tenselskünste vorgehalten, und der Jude habe selbst gestanden, dass er den Kurfürsten mit einem darzu sonderlich zugerichteten Trauk davongeholfen."

The relict of the judicially murdered Lippold never got her rights. The rest of the Jewish inhabitants were precipitated into disaster and many shared the financier's tragic fate. For the second time in that century they were compelled to evacuate Brandenburg and grasp their only support on the stony walks of pilgrimage—the wanderer's staff. The only recommendation with which the noble government honored them was to inscribe in the annals of history the fatal words: "Sie trieben doch nur Wucherei, seien Feinde der christlichen Religion, und ein Jude könne ja doch schon von Natur einem Christen nicht hold sein!" "They practiced usury notwithstanding; they are foes of the Christian religion, and a Jew could not be *naturally* friendly and amiable toward Gentiles." Sad memories, but sadder truths. Poor Lippold, adieu!